

ANSA-Africa

Strengthening accountability systems and institutions

Evidence suggests that social accountability mechanisms can help improve governance, increase development through better service delivery, and empower vulnerable poor people, especially women and children. The range of social accountability mechanisms is wide and diverse, key common building blocks include obtaining, analyzing and disseminating information, mobilising public support, and advocating and negotiating change.

A variety of strategies and methods have been developed to promote social accountability. Among this wide range of mechanisms, those that directly involve ordinary citizens in allocating, disbursing, monitoring and evaluating the use of public resources have proved very effective, since these resource flows put policy into action. The following is a brief description of selected social accountability methods that have been used as entry points at different stages of the public policy and public expenditure management cycle, especially in African nations.

Participatory budgeting

This involves direct participation by citizens and community service organisations (CSOs) in formulating public budgets (ie, in proposing projects and allocating funds). Participatory budgeting usually occurs at the local level (as in more than 100 municipalities in Brazil) but can be applied at higher levels of government. Another approach to participatory budgeting is when civil society actors prepare alternative budgets (such as South Africa's Women's Budget or Canada's Alternative Federal Budget) with a view to influencing budget formulation by expressing citizen preferences.

Public expenditure tracking

This involves citizen groups tracking how the government actually spends funds, with the aim of identifying leakages and/or bottlenecks in the flow of financial resources or inputs. Typically, these groups employ the actual users or beneficiaries of government services (assisted by CSOs) to collect and publicly disseminate data on inputs and expenditures. Information is disseminated

through media, publications and public meetings. This mechanism has been used to track primary education spending in Uganda.

Participatory performance monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

This entails citizen groups or communities monitoring the implementation and performance of public services or projects and evaluating their impact, often according to indicators they themselves have selected. This is achieved through participatory M&E tools and, at a more macro level, through public opinion surveys, public hearings or citizens' report cards. The findings of participatory M&E exercises can be publicly disseminated and presented to government officials to demand accountability and lobby for change.

Citizens' report cards

Citizen report cards are surveys that compile people's opinions on their satisfaction with service delivery and quality. A key component is workshops where citizens can engage with government officials to address their concerns regarding service delivery or quality. For a citizen report card to be effectively implemented requires the development and dissemination of appropriate information products – including leaflets, posters, newspapers, radio and television – to inform the general public about the results of the citizen report card survey.

Ultimately, the effectiveness and sustainability of social accountability mechanisms is improved when they are “institutionalised” – that is, when the government has incorporated these mechanisms into its practices and when the state's own mechanisms of accountability are rendered more transparent and open to civic engagement. To be effective in the long run, social accountability mechanisms, need to be institutionalised and linked to existing governance structures and service delivery systems.

More detailed information on social accountability mechanisms is available in the growing collection of practical reports and articles compiled by ANSA-Africa. Please visit www.ansa-africa.net/index.php/toolkits_and_methodologies/

This summary of social accountability mechanisms is an edited excerpt from “Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice”, by Carmen Malena, with Reiner Forster and Janmejay Singh, published by The World Bank in its Social Development Papers series, December 2004. The summary of citizens' report cards has been edited from a report by Craig Schwabe and Mbitha wa Kivilu of the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa on “Social Accountability Techniques, Tools and a Case Study of the Tshwane Consultative Citizen Report Card Survey”, 2007.



About ANSA-Africa: The Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in Africa (ANSA-Africa) was established in December 2006 as a joint initiative between the World Bank and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa, with the following goals:

- To develop collaboration across Africa on social accountability and demand-side governance initiatives;
- To provide technical assistance to greatly enhance the quality of social accountability initiatives in different countries;
- To deliver training programs on specific tools and techniques;
- To share country experiences and lessons from social accountability and demand-side governance initiatives, promote and build on Africans' expertise in this area; and
- To establish and strengthen a network of social accountability practitioners and the stakeholders drawn from government, research institutions and civil society.

Yours for the growth of social accountability,

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